2010-05-27T19:30:54Z

Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews: Martin Luther's Reception of John Chrysostom

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Thesis

CHRISTOLOGY IN *THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS*: MARTIN LUTHER'S RECEPTION OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

By

Erin L. Betz

(B.A. Thiel College, 2007;
M.A.R., The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, 2010)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Sacred Theology

2010

CHRISTOLOGY IN *THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS*:

MARTIN LUTHER'S RECEPTION OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

By

Erin L. Betz

APPROVED

By

First Reader Margaret A. Schatkin

Dr. Margaret A. Schatkin
Associate Professor of Church History and Theology
Boston College

Second Reader Christopher B. Brown

Dr. Christopher B. Brown
Assistant Professor of Church History
Boson University

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
LW	Luther's Works
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
WA	Weimar Edition of Luther's Works

CHRISTOLOGY IN *THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS*:

MARTIN LUTHER'S RECEPTION OF JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Erin L. Betz

Master of Sacred Theology
Boston University School of Theology, 2010

Major Professors: Margaret A. Schatkin, Associate Professor of Church History and Theology, Boston College; Christopher B. Brown, Assistant Professor of Church History

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the Church, the *Epistle to the Hebrews* has been one of the most puzzling letters in the Canon, particularly regarding the implications of understanding the person of Jesus Christ. John Chrysostom, an important patristic writer, is acknowledged to have made significant contributions to the exegesis of this letter. Chrysostom's thought became the norm for traditional thinking and interpretation of this letter in the Middle Ages. Martin Luther's reception of Chrysostom's *Homilies on Hebrews* presents a unique interpretation that some scholars may describe as the "Reformation Discovery" on Hebrews.

In tracing Luther's reception and appropriation of Chrysostom's exegesis of the letter to the Hebrews, there is a noticeable and significant shift in Christological interpretation. Whether or not these modifications were necessary is a matter of debate; however, they do reflect Luther's contextual and existential questions regarding faith, Christ and knowledge of God, which is evident in his *Lectures on Hebrews*.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

John Chrysostom (349-407)

Saint John Chrysostom, exegete, liturgist, preacher and faithful Christian, is notably one of the most influential leaders of the Nicene/Post-Nicene period in the history of the Church. His leadership as priest of Antioch and eventual bishop of Constantinople has been an inspiration to all. Chrysostom's emphasis on Christian living, *philanthropia*, orthodox teachings of theology and praxis are consistently evident throughout his many homilies on Holy Scripture. Perhaps this is why Chrysostom is perceived as a great ancient authority on Scriptural hermeneutics due to the preservation and multitude of his homilies that still exist today.

Chrysostom, also known as, "The Golden Mouth," has been a prominent voice for many theologians, especially medieval scholars. Chrysostom's commentaries and homilies have been foundational, in so far, as they were used as a theological basis for exegetical and hermeneutical explication. His homilies based on the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, in particular, have been quoted by numerous medieval theologians. With the exception of a few, it does not appear that too many scholars deviated from Chrysostom's original teachings on the Epistle. His understanding and interpretations seem to be the accepted standard for most theologians during the medieval and reformation eras of the Church.

There have been several debates about whether or not Chrysostom delivered these sermons as a presbyter in Antioch or as a bishop in Constantinople. Traditionally, they were believed to have been delivered during the latter part of his presence in Constantinople, ca. 403/404.[1] This is mainly due to its earliest citation in a letter written by Nilus of Ancyra to Gainas, a Gothic general.[2] Arguably this conclusion is in question as history notes Gainus' death in 400; therefore, Chrysostom would have written or delivered these homilies prior to 400. Scholars have been suggesting possible scenarios as to when and where these homilies were delivered and if in fact they had been written or orally presented. There is no exact way of deciphering whether these homilies were written or only spoken. Allen and Mayer refer to Blake Goodall noting, "homilies from the exegetical series which demonstrate 'spontaneous' elements and contain stylistic lapses are more likely to refer back to an orally delivered and stenographically recorded (but not subsequently edited) version."[3] They add that there are obvious differences in the written styles of the homilies as they are presented in the translations available today. This information is crucial as it influences the way one reads the medieval interpretation of the homilies *On Hebrews* and whether or not it alters the analysis.

The issue of origination between Antioch and Constantinople has divided scholars. The majority argue for Constantinopolitan provenance. Allen and Mayer state,

---

[1] Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, "The Thirty-Four Homilies on Hebrews: The Last Series Delivered by Chrysostom in Constantinople?," *Byzantion* 65 (1995): 310.

[2] Ibid, 309.

[3] Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.

"Consequently scholars have concluded that, since Chrysostom did not manage to publish the thirty-four homilies on Hebrews himself, and because there is no suggestion that any other series was published in such a manner, the homilies must have been among the last to be delivered."[4] This logic can only suggest that Constantinople is the likely answer. For this particular argument, Allen and Mayer affirm this conclusion; however, they are not entirely convinced because there is strong evidence that also points one towards origin in Antioch.

Throughout his homilies *On Hebrews* Chrysostom makes several references concerning the culture surrounding his recipients. Scholars are keen to note these key points of interest as a way of deciphering which group of people he may have been addressing. The distinctions between Antioch and Constantinople vary, depending on the culture of the people, religious backgrounds and/or contention, specific experiences/circumstances in his life, economic situations, etc.

There are two main arguments that suggest Chrysostom's homilies being delivered at a later date, which would imply a Constantinopolitan presence. Allen and Mayer note the views, "of scholars who maintain that the series must belong to Chrysostom's last years in Constantinople (402 or 403/4) because it was published after his death, and those of M. von Bonsdorff, who attributes the series to the years 402-403, that is, to the period between Chrysostom's return from Ephesus and his first exile."[5] Of

[4] Mayer and Allen, "The Thirty-Four Homilies on Hebrews," 313.

[5] Ibid, 329.

course these convictions are based on dates and most importantly, the content found within the homilies that Chrysostom references.

As a strong supporter for Constantinople provenance, Von Bonsdorff lifts up several conclusions as evidence that supports his viewpoint. Allen and Mayer outline eight of his arguments in particular. However, they dismiss a majority of them, "it must be said that not one of the arguments from 1-6 is convincing and that the *argumenta ex silentio* in 4-7 are specious. This is particularly the case with 6, where a lack of even-handedness is apparent in the argumentation. Consequently, the conclusions drawn at 7 and 8 are highly suspect."[6] Apart from this summation, Allen and Mayer do not offer further explanation of their critique of von Bonsdorff but do offer that perhaps the homilies ought to be studied individually, rather than as a sequence. As a final conclusion they suggest the following:

> It is our contention that the arguments adduced from the time of Tillemont onwards in favour of a late date for the thirty-four homilies on Hebrews are fallacious, and that no case can responsibly be made for assigning them all to Chrysostom's last years at Constantinople. As a consequence of this, the authenticity of Nilus' letter to Gainas, as well as the status of other documents which depend on the traditional dating of the series on Hebrews, stand in need of reassessment. More radically, it may be that we need to reconsider not only the date but also the provenance of the homilies on Hebrews, either individually or as a 'collection.'[7]

There is certainly evidence for supporting an Antiochene presence in Chrysostom's *On Hebrews* as well. It should be noted that Antioch during this time was thoroughly Hellenized. The Jewish population was quite active and was likely to adhere

[6] Ibid, 332.

[7] Ibid, 333.

to their religious practices. Mayer and Allen suggest that these factors led to Chrysostom's homilies *Against the Jews*, a strong reaction to Jewish presence and customs.

As a presbyter of Antioch, Chrysostom's preaching was highly respected by other members within the Church body. His homilies were seen as a guide and response to the cultural heresies of the day as well as specific events pertaining to its citizens. Opelt, in particular, appeals for the origin of Chrysostom's homilies *On Hebrews* in Antioch. The main argument found here is Chrysostom's reference to the many spectators of the Olympics, which can be found in Homily 14:10. Allen and Mayer support this evidence; however, they discuss the holes within this brief argument stating, "When she [Opelt] assumes that by demonstrating that the one homily was delivered at Antioch this automatically reverses the tide of opinion regarding the provenance of every other homily within the series, we find that we can no longer agree with her conclusions."[8] They also critique her convictions by remarking that the evidence does not support her other notions regarding the timeline in which the homilies were written.

In response to the overwhelming amount of conflicting evidence, Allen and Mayer suggest, "Not only is this 'series' not a series in the usual sense, namely that it constitutes a group of homilies delivered in sequence over a period of time at a single place, but the accepted date of individual homilies can as a consequence no longer be

[8] Ibid, 334.

relied on."[9] They later add, "There is no simple solution to this problem. Rather, each exemplum must be considered carefully within its immediate context and a decision made on the basis of its own merits."[10] Allen and Mayer suggest that a reassessment of the homilies is needed. Perhaps new evaluations with diverse criteria, such as significant cultural differences between Antioch and Constantinople, are also positive options.

Regardless of the many debates over origin, a clear verdict has not been agreed upon in modern scholarship. This background information will be important to remember as we approach the themes and overall messages in the chapters pertaining to Chrysostom's *On Hebrews*. This will become more apparent as Chrysostom's surroundings are illuminated through his rhetoric and tones and how he relates the homilies with the cultural settings. His homilies played a significant role for a considerable number of medieval and reformation theologians, especially Martin Luther. It will be important to note Chrysostom's convictions on the Epistle and particularly, his thoughts on Christology and how they evolve through the works of Luther as he appropriates them in the 16th century.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

As a theologian, priest, composer and reformer of the Church, Martin Luther the reformer, has significantly participated in shaping exegetical approaches to the Bible from the Reformation and beyond. These changes may easily be seen throughout his

[9] Ibid, 336.

[10] Ibid, 339.

lectures and commentaries, especially on the New Testament. Chrysostom's homilies are saturated throughout his *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, which has been noted in several secondary sources. This would have been standard, as Chrysostom's writings were the foundation for all traditional medieval thinking and resources.

The lecture series on Hebrews is quite interesting because it showcases a "Young Luther." He delivered these lectures in the years 1517-1518 at the University of Wittenberg.[11] It was only recently that these lectures have been discovered, edited and published.[12] Most likely these lectures were not extant from Luther's own pen. Rather, scholars suggest that they were written by students of Luther who had gathered to hear his lecture. Comparatively, the final outcome of this theological exegesis of Hebrews will illustrate a young Luther's perspective that will somewhat deviate from his interpretations later in his life.

As previously articulated, Luther consistently relied on Chrysostom's homilies on Hebrews than any other writer. The edition of Chrysostom's work that was used by most medieval exegetes on Hebrews was an early Latin version, Mutiani.[13] Hagen explicates this origin in the footnotes, "In the sixth century Cassiodorus (d. 563) delegated his friend, Mutian, probably a monk, to translate into Latin Chrysostom's Homilies on

---

[11] Kenneth Hagen, "The Problem of Testament in Luther's *Lectures on Hebrews*," *Harvard Theological Review* 63, (1970): 61.

[12] Ibid, 62.

[13] CLAVIS PATRVM GRAECORVM, vol. 2, Brepols – Turnhout, 1974.

Hebrews."[14] This early version is significant for Luther studies as it implies that the Latin version that Luther used did not deviate too far from the original assumed Greek text.

Another major source for Luther's interpretation on Hebrews and other exegetical work is the Basel Bible of 1508.[15] Hagen explains that this Bible contains several helpful manuscripts as hermeneutical tools. These works include: "the interlinear and marginal Gloss, the *Postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra, the *Additiones* to Lyra's *Postillae* by Paul of Burgos, and the *Replicae* to Burgos's *Additiones* by Matthias Doering."[16] The *Glossa*, both Interlinaris and Ordinaria, are of particular importance for Luther's lecture on Hebrews. Hagan suggests that Peter Lombard composed the final copy of the Gloss on both St. Paul and the Psalms.[17] While Lombard certainly used the Gloss extensively throughout his *Sentences*, he was certainly not the last to quote or alter it. Scholars may disagree to this hypothesis; therefore a brief description of the Glossa is in order.

Scholars have noted that the *Glossa ordinaria* is a collective work of the twelfth century. It is printed in Migne's *Patrologia Latina* under the Carolingian scholar Walafrid Strabo.[18] Matter suggests an important insight on Glossa studies, "One of the

---

[14] Hagen, "The Problem of Testament," 64.

[15] Ibid, 65.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 65-66.

[18] E. Ann Matter, "The Church Fathers and the Glossa Ordinaria," In *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. Irena Backus, Vol. 1, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 83.

most important insights of this process is the awareness that the *Glossa ordinaria* to each book (or collection of books) to the Bible had an independent development, and therefore drew on different sources from earlier centuries of Christian biblical learning."[19]

According to Matter this new observation has modified scholars' perception of medieval biblical studies and resources. It has certainly increased their interest in patristic reception and other resources that may have influenced medieval theology and thinkers. Matter emphasizes that what can be found within the Glossa ordinaria is duly noted as it "represents a continuation of the patristic tradition of biblical commentary."[20] She also suggests that, "The content of the commentary arranged around the biblical text in gloss manuscripts is ultimately patristic, often mediated through Carolingian compendia or reworkings of patristic exegesis, and then further selected and adapted for twelfth-century students of the Bible."[21] This patristic lineage is important to consider, especially as it draws significant connections between medieval and patristic exegesis and hermeneutics.

Of course, Luther was a product of the 16th century; however, he was heavily influenced by the thoughts that percolated out of the early and medieval centuries. His usage of the Glossa would not have been out of the ordinary for theological thinkers, even for the 16th century. Matter's final thoughts pertaining to the purpose of the *Glossa*

---

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid, 85.

[21] Ibid.

writes, "The form these ancient and early medieval Christian writings took in the *Glossa* is the heart and soul of the twelfth-century schools. When we understand this process more thoroughly, we will have learned the secrets of the medieval Latin tradition of biblical exegesis."[22] The Medieval Latin tradition which Matter refers to is inherently associated with Luther and his Christological convictions based on resources such as the patristic thinking in the *Glossa* and others.

The *Glossa*, a Pauline Epistle, as traditionally interpreted by both Chrysostom and medieval theologians, emphasizes the *eminentia Christi* of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In other words, Christ is greater than the all of the prophets and the angels in the Old Testament. It portrays Paul's words and interpretations of the Old versus the New Testament. The New Testament is seemingly better and faith in Christ sustains life better than the old Law of Moses and the prophets. Hagen writes, "The *Glossa ordinaria* gives a summary statement of the first eight chapters of Hebrews by saying that the major theme has been to show the 'difference between the Testaments' because the New surpasses the Old as well as transforms it."[23] This perception of Hebrews is important for Luther, although he does not necessarily ascribe to its teachings and line of thought. This will be evident in the following chapters as Luther expresses his own convictions on the Epistle, as well as his developed Christology.

---

[22] Ibid, 109.

[23] Hagen, "The Problem of Testament," 67.

Scholars of the Middle Ages ascribed editorship to Anselm of Laon of the *Glossa ordinaria* to the Pauline Epistles. Authorship of these letters is quite diverse and selection is made based on appropriation of Latin patristic commentaries from major thinkers such as: Augustine, Jerome and Origen. This idea has recently changed based on Middle Age references to "Amb." or "Ambr." Matter comments that Anselm had originally interpreted this footnote as a reference to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan; however, she states that the author is "a still largely unstudied anonymous fourth-century Roman author we (following Erasmus) know as Ambroasiaster."[24] She also indicates that this misconception of authorship enabled its circulation throughout the Middle Ages as Ambrose's commentary on the Pauline Epistles in Latin.[25]

A third resource for Luther's exegetical conclusions on the Epistle to the Hebrews is the works of Nicholas of Lyra, mainly his *Postillae*. In Lyra's summation of Hebrews he suggests three main points about the Epistle: firstly, that the author has already perceived inadequacies found within the Hebrew Bible. Second, he understands the New Testament as "the perfection of the New Testament with reference to the Old."[26] The third notion suggests, "Hebrews is the *ordo* of the two Testaments or laws. The relationship is that 'when the new comes the old passes away.'"[27] Again, here the

---

[24] Matter, 107.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Hagen, "The Problem of Testament," 70.

[27] Ibid.

traditional perception of Hebrews is being considered by Lyra as well. The focal point is the emphasis on the actions portrayed in the New Testament as not only further validating the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible but also establishing the commandments and actions of Jesus Christ as noted in the New Testament above the laws of Moses found in the ways of the Old. This idea certainly played a significant role for Luther in his own exegetical concerns and interpretations. Other resources such as the commentaries of Lorenzo Valla (ca. 1406-1457), Jacobus Faber Stapulensis (ca. 1455-1536), and Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466-1536) were also cited by Luther in this lecture series.[28]

Medieval exegetes in general perceived this Epistle in more or less the same fashion, Luther included. To summarize, Hagen describes this interpretation as "a comparison of the two Testaments which results in highlighting the *excellentia Christi*. The conclusion of the comparison between Christ and the angels, Moses and the priest is that Christ is *excellentior*."[29] In a later description, Hagen remarks, "The New marks progress over the Old. On the same level and line of development, the New absorbs the Old, transforms it, and recasts it in terms of Christ."[30] It will be important to note this understanding as we trace the steps scholars have taken to understand this Epistle and the ramifications of traditional thought throughout the history of the Church.

While Luther certainly had access to more exegetical thought and commentary-like resources on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* than Chrysostom, it did not hinder his own

---

[28] Ibid, 71.

[29] Ibid, 73.

[30] Ibid.

exegetical work and development of thought. These ideas will be illustrated further in the chapters to follow that will address specifically his interpretations of the Christ Event, and its implications found in the Epistle, mainly, Christ alone as the center for both the Old and the New.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGETICAL CONCERNS

The Epistle to the Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews has been one of the most debated books in the New Testament Canon. It has been cited in early works such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* (120-140), *1 Clement* (ca. 80-140) and other works written by early church thinkers and writers. The debate for Pauline authorship has been its main source of criticism throughout the history of the Church. In addition to authorship, the origin, audience and time frame has also been disputed among scholars. This chapter will present these issues with a brief synopsis of the debates and possible conclusions regarding the "So-Called Epistle to the Hebrews," particularly as they have been noted throughout history and how they are viewed by Chrysostom and Luther.

Early Christians certainly did not agree on whether or not this Epistle shared in authority with other New Testament writings. It was not until Augustine and Jerome that the Epistle to the Hebrews became of equal weight with the other books of the Canon.[31] These early Church Fathers declared the Epistle to the Hebrews both "Pauline" and "Canonical." Much like the thinkers in the early Church, this debate among scholars is still very alive and active today. A general consensus has not been reached; however, the

[31] Pamela M. Eisenbaum, "Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins," In *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*, ed. Gabriella Gelardini, *Biblical Interpretation Series* Vol. 75, (Leiden;Boston: Brill, 2005), 213.

notion of Pauline authorship has become increasingly disfavored in modern and post-modern times.

To discuss briefly the history of this debate, we will look to Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, as a reliable witness of the developed thoughts on the topic. Eusebius makes two references regarding the Epistle to the Hebrews in Book Six. He mentions other citations of the epistle but we will discuss mainly Clement and Origen's positions. He firstly writes of Clement of Alexandria who credits Paul as the author of the Letter. Clement addresses specifically the omission of the normal Pauline heading, "I, Paul an apostle" as a way of avoiding suspicions among the Hebrew people. Eusebius describes Clement's reasoning as follows: "It was written for Hebrews in their own language, and then accurately translated by Luke and published for Greek readers. Hence, in the Greek version of this epistle we find the same stylistic colour as in the Acts."[32] Eusebius then quotes Clement by arguing that Paul's tactic had to be changed from his other letters in order to gain credibility and attention from the Hebrew people. He attributes this change in heading as a sign of Paul's "modesty" in reaching out to the Hebrews, since he was an apostle of the Gentiles. This, of course, is one view point presented by Clement.

Eusebius also expounds another viewpoint as produced by Origen of Alexandria. Surprisingly, Origen takes a different stance from Clement. He does not seem altogether convinced of Pauline authorship in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Rather, he adduces an

[32] Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 192.

ambiguous scenario of doubt but still maintains a sense of truth towards the Epistle. In doing this he acknowledges the Epistle's validity and Christological ramifications. Eusebius quotes Origen's comments on this work. I shall outline the main arguments from this excerpt as follows:

> The diction does not exhibit the characteristic roughness of speech or phraseology admitted by the Apostle himself, the construction of the sentences is closer to Greek usage, as anyone capable of recognizing differences of style would agree. On the other hand the matter of the epistle is wonderful, and quite equal to the Apostle's acknowledged other writings...So if any church regards this epistle as Paul's, it should be commended for so doing, for the primitive Church had every justification for handing it down as his. Who wrote the epistle is known to God alone: the accounts that have reached us suggest that it was either Clement, who became Bishop of Rome, or Luke, who wrote the gospel and the Acts.[33]

While Origen does not necessarily completely defend Pauline authorship as Clement, he does defend the nature of the epistle. It is also interesting that both Clement and Origen associate the author with Luke and Epistle of Acts. They both support this claim by the stylistic criterion which is characteristic in both the Gospel Luke and the Epistle of Acts.

Interestingly, it should be noted that Clement's hypothesis of authorship has been adopted by the *Glossa Ordinaria.*[34] This incorporation has had specific ramifications, especially on western medieval interpretation and thinking. Therefore until recently, the

---

[33] Ibid, 202.

[34] Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, *Hebrews*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas Oden, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), xvii.

common reception of thinking had maintained some sort of Pauline association, if not exclusive authorship.

Modern scholarship has been analyzing this debate of authorship as well. Pamela Eisenbaum presents a modern perspective on this issue. She does not exactly offer a firm conclusion but does make several key points which should not be disregarded for dialectical purposes. One element to the epistle is that its early Greek manuscripts were more than likely circulated with other Pauline letters. Also, as indicated earlier, this text was referred to in several early Christian writings. Eisenbaum suggests, "Second-century writers who demonstrate knowledge of Hebrews also demonstrate knowledge of other Pauline letters, and sometimes of a letter collection. In short, ancient Christian readers consistently associated Hebrews either with Paul or the *corpus Paulinum*, even as patristic literati recognized the problem of assigning Hebrews to Paul."[35]

One question that seems to puzzle scholars largely pertains to the heading of Paul's Letters. If Paul indeed wrote *To the Hebrews*, then why did he not put his name on it? Or write under pseudo-authorship? Whoever the author is, it is clear that they preferred anonymity which makes the Letter one of mysteriousness and ambiguity. Eisenbaum's conclusions regarding the letter are quite intriguing. She writes, "I want to propose that the author of Hebrews was motivated by an *issue* rather than an occasion, and, further, that he was inspired by other Christian literature, most importantly, the

[35] Eisenbaum, 219.

letters of Paul, known to him as a corpus."[36] Eisenbaum's critique of scholarship here is an interesting position because it seeks to look beyond historical data and get to the heart of the text's mission and purpose. She continues in adding, "I suggest that Hebrews was composed by an educated and theologically reflective person who wished to clarify and perhaps unify competing Christological claims. The author is much more concerned about the subject of which he writes, namely a systematic understanding of Christology, than about the behavior or well-being of his audience."[37] I would like to lift up Eisenbaum's point here as a lens for further reflection, particularly in receiving Chrysostom's theological and exegetical inclinations towards the text; especially in regards to his Christological interpretations and for those he is engaging.

Throughout his homilies, Chrysostom decidedly credits Paul as the author of the epistle. He makes direct references to Paul consistently throughout the 34 Homilies on the Hebrews. This perspective, of course, affects the way one thinks about a particular scenario and viewpoint as portrayed by the assumed author. This will be important to note as we discuss the chapter on Chrysostom's Christology which is based specifically on the epistle.

Luther, on the other hand, does reference Paul in his lectures, but interestingly in the American edition of Luther's Works, the text translates Luther's citations as "the Apostle." Traditionally, patristic writers have used the term "apostle" and it always

---

[36] Ibid, 222.

[37] Ibid.

implies Paul. I cannot determine whether or not this edition has been intentional in using a non-specific noun for the author or if this is an accurate translation of Luther's work. Hagen makes explicit reference to Luther's quotations of Paul and the epistle; therefore, supporting the traditional medieval acceptance of Pauline authorship. Contrastingly, Heen and Krey are not entirely convinced of this reception. They write, "Luther, noting the theological distinctiveness of the letter as well as the elegance of the Greek and its expository style, suggested Apollos as the author of Hebrews, whom Acts 18:24 describes as Jewish, from Alexandria, 'an eloquent man, well versed in the Scriptures.'"[38] Unfortunately, Heen and Krey do not support this statement with any further evidence regarding Luther's acceptance of authorship. Specific references found throughout Luther's works help to support this theory even though Heen and Krey do not explicitly state these sources.[39]

Another issue concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews is the date when it was written. Scholars have considered the fact that it has been referenced early on in Christian writing. The lack of concrete evidence pointing to an exact historical moment of significance has led Harold Attridge to suggest a date between 60-100 CE.[40]

---

[38] Heen and Krey, xviii.

[39] References from Luther's writings regarding authorship include the following: WA Vol. 31/1/533, "I think the author was Apollos"; Lectures on Genesis, LW 8:178, "The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—whoever he is, whether Paul or, as I think, Apollos."; Luther's 1522 Christmas Postil sermon on Hebrews 1:1-12, WA 10/1/1:143, tr. in John Nicholas Lenker, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* 3/2:167:"Some are of the opinion it was written by Luke, others by Apollos."

[40] Eisenbaum, 226.

Eisenbaum contends with this notion by proposing three possible explanations for a late first-early second century date of origin. She notes the chronological space indicated in the author's writing that separates the time of Jesus and his audience. She uses the author's words, "'Confirmed for us by those who heard him' indicates that the writer of Hebrews is at least one generation removed from Jesus and his first followers."[41] The point here advocates for a later writer who may be removed from the first followers of Christ. The second conclusion is based on an observation of the author's knowledge of the person of Jesus. She conveys the fact that there is a high probability that the author had access to the other gospels due to the content related to Jesus' life.[42] The author has implemented these details in the text, indicating the distinction of time that the gospels were circulated among communities. The final thought on the matter deals with Eisenbaum's observation of the manner in which the manuscript was drafted. She recognizes the differences between first and second century writing styles. She considers second century writers to maintain a more "elevated style" of writing. Her conclusions with this third point are clearly rhetorical in nature. She states, "While certainly there were real-life circumstances that influenced the writer of Hebrews to compose his brilliant essay on Christology, it might also be the case that the author is partly motivated by the very existence of other Christian literature that is in circulation."[43]

---

[41] Ibid, 227.

[42] Ibid, 228.

[43] Ibid, 230.

Whether or not this epistle was, in fact, written to the Hebrews is yet another question that has not been answered in scholarship. Certainly the author presents an agenda to his audience; however, whether or not the audience is "the Hebrews" is unclear. Traditionally, it has been interpreted that the author was writing with the intent that the directed audience was a community of faith who may be experiencing difficulties both theologically and culturally. Certainly there is an element of Judaic knowledge as well as Christian perseverance that may be found within the letter. I find Eisenbaum's convictions to be of considerable interest. She senses that there does not appear to be any evidence that identifies a particular geographic location; therefore, it is unclear where this letter was intended. She writes, "To the extent that audiences are always projections by an author, understanding Hebrews as written not to a single community but rather to a more broadly understood body of Christians does more justice to the text of Hebrews than narrowing its implied audience to a single place at a single moment."[44] This concept is engaging because it does not discredit the author's projected intent, nor does it deny the ambiguity surrounding the letter.

Ultimately, the author's directed audience can only be assumed as Christians, possibly Jews and God-fearers. Chronologically, the time frame of which this letter may have been written would have been influenced by several wars instigated by Rome

---

[44] Ibid, 231.

towards both Christian and Jewish communities. Scholars and commentators have consented to this viewpoint due to several references of persecution.

Typically this letter has been perceived as an extremely supersessionist document. Those ideas can certainly be found in the works of John Chrysostom and Martin Luther. As history can attest, these ideas have been problematic and the ramifications have been significant in view of tragic events such as the holocaust. Interestingly, Eisenbaum lifts up another perception of this letter and its author. She suggests, "The 'situation' that most likely inspired the author of Hebrews, is indeed religious identity, but this identity is not one form of Christianity over against another, nor is it even the attempt to construct a Christian identity over against Jewish identity."[45] She supports this statement by sensing a lack of polemics which are often found in the Gospels and Pauline epistles. Her argument pinpoints second century authors who pick up anti-Jewish polemic ideas in their work. Furthermore, she writes, "The authors of 1 Peter, 1 Clement, and other works known only in fragments from Eusebius are not concerned to construct a rhetoric of difference between Judaism and Christianity."[46]

Scholars generally place Hebrews in the same rhetorical category as 1 Peter and 1 Clement; therefore, Eisenbaum is suggesting that there may be more resonance between the three than generally noted. She makes the argument that the shared experiences of persecution between Christians, Jews and God-fearers may have been the shared

[45] Ibid, 235-36.

[46] Ibid, 236.

similarity among these documents. Eisenbaum adduces, "Whereas once I would have lumped Hebrews together with Barnabas because of its supersessionist theology, I now see Hebrews' 'supersessionism' as possibly a desperate attempt to construct anew a religious heritage that seems to have all but disappeared."[47] I find this idea to be intriguing because it lessens the negative stigma of the Epistle to the Hebrews that is often apprehended by Christian Origins or New Testament scholars. Positively she concludes that the Epistle to the Hebrews is, "in some ways neither Judaism nor Christianity and in other ways it represents both – a unique form of Judeo-Christian religiosity that perhaps existed briefly when Rome was the common enemy of Jews and believers in Jesus and before the rhetoric of Christian and Jewish leaders could construct firm boundaries between Judaism and Christianity."[48]

Certainly Eisenbaum's theory depicts a more positive light on what is generally perceived as a "supersessionist" book of the canon. Whether or not these notions are clearly the author's intent may be debated. Chrysostom and Luther will pick up on the teachings of Christ within the text and use hermeneutical resources that were pertinent to their time and context. Ultimately, they both sense the author's emphasis on the Christological concerns surrounding the community of faith, as will be evident in their exegetical works.

---

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid, 236-37.

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

John Chrysostom's 34 homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews is quite an extensive document. It follows the structure that is typically found throughout the majority of his homilies, including: statement of text, exegetical breakdown, associated heresies of the day and a concluding section suggesting ethical implementation and praxis in daily life. Of course there are other aspects of his homilies that are significant as well but this is a general statement about the main themes that are consistent throughout his work.

For succinctness and clarity, I will use this chapter to outline Chrysostom's main conclusions regarding his teaching on Christology. Furthermore, due to the sheer volume of the document, I will only be focusing on certain passages of Scripture that appear pertinent to this study; therefore, only specific homilies will be analyzed and quoted. I hope to illustrate to the reader Chrysostom's writing style and ultimate concerns in his homilies. To analyze his entire commentary would require a much more extensive and detailed study.

Chrysostom's approach to exegetical concerns through homiletic delivery is perceived with a sense of humility and humbleness of heart. He articulates this appeal, stating in Homily II, "We ought therefore to receive all things with faith and reverence, and when our discourse fails through weakness, and is not able to set forth accurately the things which are spoken, then especially to glorify God, for that we have such a God,

surpassing both our thought and our conception."[49] I include this quote from Chrysostom because I believe it gives the reader insight into his purpose and intentions for writing his homilies. His understanding of the "incomprehensible God" can generally be seen as the foundation behind all of his theological writings. He continues in Homily II, "For many of our conceptions about God, we are unable to express, as also many things we express, but have not the strength to conceive of them."[50] The reader will find that this expression of the inconceivable is consistent with Chrysostom's main points about understanding the person and acts of Jesus Christ, especially in his homilies on Hebrews.

According to the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, edition of Chrysostom's works, editor Frederic Gardiner states that the writer and preserver of these homilies is evident in the original title of the manuscript, entitled, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople on the Epistle to the Hebrews, published after his decease, from notes by Constantine, Presbyter of Antioch*.[51] Gardiner indicates in the footnotes that Montfaucon has noted that this title is often interchanged.

The author begins the epistle by writing in the prologue, what could be debated as the strongest and most significant Christological statement of the entire letter:

> Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He

[49] NPNF1 14:370.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid, 337.

> is the reflection of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.[52]

Firstly, this opening declaration establishes the relationship between God the Father and the Son. The author establishes a sense of separation between God's advocates of old and the new advocate: the Son. Chrysostom notes this separation ironically as a continuum between the Old and New covenants. He writes, "For here thou hast but pointed out both the New and Old [Covenants] are of One and the same: and that this superiority is not great. Wherefore he henceforth follows on upon this argument, saying, 'He spake unto us by [His] Son.'"[53]

This consistency between Old and New covenants is important to note because it signifies that there are not two gods working in each covenant. Rather, Christ, as the second person of the Godhead, also "created the worlds." Chrysostom addresses this stating, "'By whom also He made the worlds [the ages].' Where are those who say, there was [a time] when He was not?"[54] Of course, this is likely a direct response to the Arian position teaching that there was a time when Christ was not with the Godhead. In other words the Arian notion posits that Jesus was created; he did not exist in the beginning of

---

[52] Hebrews 1:1-4 NRSV

[53] NPNF1 14:367.

[54] Ibid.

the ages. Chrysostom is clearly refuting this idea, as it clearly does not support the orthodox position, as set forth by the church in 325 C.E. in Nicaea.

The ACCS quotes Chrysostom, "It is the Son who has the full knowledge of God the Father, and it is only [the Son] who was able to make us partakers of the divine grace."[55] In other words, Chrysostom's connections between Christ's divinity, as described by the author, have ultimate and infinite ramifications for "us," the intended audience and community of faith. As emphasized previously, a majority of Chrysostom's homilies are intended to be applicable for his intended audience, as they depict an accurate illustration of the person of Jesus Christ and what that means for their daily lives. An important distinction; however, is to know that Chrysostom is mainly stressing the point that Christ has two natures. In doing so, Chrysostom is establishing a sense of orthodox perspective on the person of Christ who has "full knowledge," which suggests his divinity and "who was able to make us partakers," signifies his humanity.

Another interesting Christological point Chrysostom posits is in Homily IV where he begins to talk about the implications of the cross. He writes, "Seest thou the fruit of the Cross, how great it is? Fear not the matter: for it seemeth to thee indeed to be dismal, but it brings forth good things innumerable."[56] He is able to correlate the fruits of the Cross with the grace of God as a real, active charity in love. Chrysostom quotes Romans 8:32 to validate his point, "'That by the grace of God,' he says. And he indeed because

[55] ACCS, 3.

[56] NPNF1 14:383.

of the grace of God towards us suffered these things. 'He who spared not His Own Son,' he says, 'but delivered Him up for us all…He did not owe us this, but has done it of grace.'"[57]

What I find to be most alluring in this text is Chrysostom's emphasis on "all," a characteristic in patristic writing that is often overlooked by scholars, particularly of the West. Furthermore, he states, "That by the grace of God He should taste death for every man [*sic*],' not for the faithful only, but even for the whole world: for He indeed died for all; But what if all have not believed? He hath fulfilled His own [part]."[58] Interestingly, this message appears universal in nature, which can only be assumed to be intentional. I would be interested to know the nature of Chrysostom's audience and whether or not he purposefully crafted his words in such a way to portray a hope for salvation for all, "not for the faithful only, but even for the whole world."

Chrysostom also notes the Christ event as a significant moment in time where Death, and the Devil, has been defeated. He writes, "Next he [Paul] sets down also the cause of the economy. 'That through death,' he says, 'He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.'"[59] This imagery of defeating death is notably the foundation that he uses to explain the necessity of orthodox Christological thought using the Scripture. Chrysostom explicates the author's understanding of the Christ event,

---

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid. 385.

"Here he [Paul] points out the wonder, that by what the devil prevailed, by that was he overcome, and the very thing which was his strong weapon against the world, [namely], Death, by this Christ smote him."[60] Chrysostom understands Christ's death to be a necessary event that seeks to destroy Death, personified in the devil. This will be important to note, as Luther picks up on this point in his own lectures. For both thinkers, the dualistic nature of Good conquering evil becomes a key motivation in comprehending the gravity of the human condition and God's love to redeem God's people.

One unique feature of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is the author's depiction of Christ as the High Priest. Both Chrysostom and Luther elaborate on this concept as a notion of high Christology within their exegesis. Chrysostom, in particular, uses the understanding of the High Priest to exemplify Christ's two natures: human and divine. In Homily V he asserts Christ's High Priesthood as utmost faithfulness. For Chrysostom, this faithfulness is key to unlocking the genius behind Christ's necessary dual natures; therefore, refuting certain heresies that suggest otherwise. He declares, "What is 'faithful'? True, able. For the Son is a faithful High Priest, able to deliver from their sins those whose High Priest He is. In order then that He might offer a sacrifice able to purify us, for this cause He has become man."[61]

In other words, it is absolutely imperative that Christ became flesh so that he, as a faithful High Priest, could become a true sacrifice for all humanity. Chrysostom repeats

---

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid, 389.

this notion throughout his homilies adding the conclusion that Christ's sacrifice is greater than anything because he knows the true human condition due to his two natures. Later in the text he states, "He saw us in this condition, and had compassion on us, not appointing a High Priest for us, but Himself becoming a High Priest. In what sense He was 'faithful,' he added, 'to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."[62] The "faithfulness of Jesus" is also meant to exemplify Christ's obedience to God the Father as he is both, Son of God and Son of humanity. Chrysostom and many scholars throughout time will elaborate further upon the "faithfulness of Jesus" as another element sought in the Christ event.

Chrysostom preaches on the greatness of the High Priest in several homilies. I believe that his main message in doing so reiterates the role Jesus Christ fulfills interims of human duty and apprehension. In Homily VII, he bases his conclusions on Hebrews 4: 11-13. Here he teaches the importance of Christ's human nature communicating with the divine. He writes, "He is not (he means) ignorant of what concerns us, as many of the High Priests, who know not those in tribulations, nor that there is tribulation at any time…Our High Priest endured all things. Therefore He endured first and then ascended, that He might be able to sympathize with us."[63] The strength in Chrysostom's argument here is to appeal to his audience that their troubles have been felt by God; that their cries have been heard, not just by any human priest, but a High Priest who is both human and

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid, 400.

divine. Certainly, Chrysostom's tactics here are directed towards those who may be skeptical or question the two natures of Christ. This argument would most likely refute those objections.

As will become standard for medieval thinking, Chrysostom interprets the letter by contrasting the Old versus New Testaments, hence the later development of the phraseology, *excellentia Christi*. He is consistently showcasing what he perceives as the author's intention of comparison. In other words, the New Testament is better than the Old; Christ is superior to Moses. It should be noted that Chrysostom does not invalidate the Hebrew Scripture but does advocate that the Christ event has changed its perception, as well as duties of the law, suggesting that the new is subsequently better than the old. In Homily VIII he states, "The blessed Paul wishes to show in the next place that this covenant is far better than the old."[64] He will further support this claim by speaking of the author's rhetorical gradation, "Up to a certain point he lays down first the things which are common [to Christ and their High Priests], and then shows that He is superior."[65] Christ is superior over the angels, the prophets and even Moses. Luther will expound upon this particular aspect of traditional interpretation of the letter; however, he will choose to find fault with Chrysostom's conclusion and seeks to add further insight.

The final observation to be made on Chrysostom's commentary includes his most compelling argument on the "assurance of faith." He formally discusses this concept in

---

[64] Ibid, 403.

[65] Ibid.

Homily XIX, Hebrews 10:19-23; however, I would argue that this idea is woven throughout all of his homilies in different forms. For Chrysostom, the Christ event represents a deep assurance of hope for humanity. He relies on the author's urgency and steadfastness to convey his message of life, once death has been defeated. Chrysostom quotes the author, "'A new and living way.' Here he expresses 'the full assurance of hope.' 'New,' he says. He is anxious to show that we have all things greater...'A new and living way,' he says, for the first was a way of death, leading to Hades, but this of life."[66] The element of faith which Chrysostom stresses so greatly throughout his homilies is mirrored in Luther's writing as well but on a much enlarged scale. It is interesting to note that the unifying themes between Luther and Chrysostom are faith and a desire to articulate the Christ event for his own context.

Ultimately, Chrysostom seeks to challenge his audience to revel in the new way of life by using the *Epistle to the Hebrews* as a basis for uplifting the community of faith. He encourages the people to seek truth, in so far as it reveals who Christ is and what the implications of his acts mean for the world. He intends to teach the people that as Christians, they have accepted a "new life." This new life assumes more responsibility than just "right teaching" but also a "right way" of living, mainly to love one's neighbor and be steadfast in faith. This new way of living is to be bound in faith to the great High Priest who sacrificed himself so that all might be perfected.

---

[66] Ibid, 454.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARTIN LUTHER

Luther's reception of Chrysostom's commentaries and theological interpretations has been studied by scholars. As emphasized earlier, Luther relied heavily on Chrysostom as a hermeneutical tool in his own lectures on Hebrews. One thing that is important to note regarding this reception, however, is Luther's deviation from Chrysostom's main themes. Luther takes Chrysostom's work and emphasizes the Christ event within them in much different ways. I posit that both approaches for each writer appear to be pertinent to his own context. Chrysostom would, of course, have been speaking to a much different audience, with different needs and concerns than Luther and vice versa. This chapter seeks to discuss Luther's Christological interpretations from the Epistle. It will also demonstrate Luther's reception and appropriation of Chrysostom; where he followed and where he deviated from Chrysostom as well as traditional and medieval thought.

The Christology found within Luther's lectures, I would argue, is not heavily dogmatic in nature. Rather, I would contend that they are saturated with both theology and praxis. He is mainly concerned with faith and Christology as will be evident in this chapter. These elements, faith and Christology, are also reflected in Chrysostom's rhetoric as well which I have already explicated in the previous section. Luther was not so much concerned with orthodox versus heretical teachings as Chrysostom, but instead

focused on the ramifications of teaching Scripture and what the Christ event means for everyday life and Christian faith. These concerns are evident as Luther's later works reflect his internal wrestling and quest for understanding God and God's manifestations.

An important thing to consider while reading *On Hebrews*, is Luther's intent and focus for his lectures. His concerns were not so much placed upon Christology in the patristic sense, not because he rejected it, but rather these concepts had already been accepted by the majority of scholarship of his time. Bernhard Lohse comments on this, "Luther thus affirmed the christological dogma of the ancient church because he regarded it as a materially correct summary of the Scripture's witness to Christ. At the same time he always gave it a particular interpretation."[67] In addition to Lohse's critique, Manfred Schulze also notes Luther's perception of the issues with Christological contentions. Schulze quotes Luther stating, "We Christians must beware not to divide the person of Christ nor to mingle the two natures, the divine and the human, in one nature,' but to distinguish the nature or essence and keep the persons as one."[68]

I believe this is an important distinction to consider while noting Luther's reception of Chrysostom. The concern that enticed Luther and his focus was the issue of the incarnation and how we can know God. [69] Whereas Chrysostom, taking a Nestorian

---

[67] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 221.

[68] Manfred Schulze, "Martin Luther and the Church Fathers," In *Reception of the Fathers in the West*, ed. Irena Backus, 587.

[69] Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 22.

position, placed a greater emphasis on distinguishing between the two natures of Christ, Luther wanted to get at the heart of Christ event. Luther wanted to unify the divine and human natures as active participants working together. This begs the question, how is the incarnation salvific?

In looking towards the cross, we are able to grapple with the idea that God became human and if anything, we can know God through the incarnation. To add to the discussion, Lienhard writes, "Placing the incarnation in the thought of Luther in this way and explaining the emphasis that he has put upon it does not in our view imply that he did not accept the traditional doctrine of Christology…The question which above all preoccupied him is that of salvation and faith."[70]

Luther's particular fascination with the incarnation has inherently supported certain departures from the traditional theologies of Chrysostom and other patristic writers. Lohse makes another important observation about Luther's works on the Phil 2:7 text, "Though his statements must be interpreted with caution since Christology in the sixteenth century was generally never in dispute, we can observe a tendency in Luther to give a fresh interpretation to the 'emptying' (*kenosis*) at the incarnation…At this juncture Luther departed from ancient church Christology."[71] Basically his interpretation of the scene of the cross is that Christ was without or "abandoned" by the Godhead. This idea is echoed in a later discussion on his lecture on Hebrews 2:7. It was certainly one of him

[70] Ibid, 22-23.

[71] Lohse, 229.

more controversial exegetical interpretations; however, Lohse suggests that it does not completely encapsulate Luther as a whole and his entire Christological perspective. Lohse writes, "The doctrine of ubiquity corresponds far better to the thrust of Luther's Christology than do his statements on Jesus' self-emptying at his incarnation, or on his abandonment by God at the cross."[72] Lohse reasons this observation about ubiquity, which states that Christ is present everywhere is to be considered as an aid to help discern Christ's true presence. He adds, "The fundamental position that God's presence is salutary only where connected with the humanity of Jesus Christ is central to Luther's theology."[73]

Pertaining to his own theological progression, some scholars have sought to demonstrate that Luther's lectures on Hebrews played a significant role in the development towards his theology of the cross. Lienhard concurs, "The fact that God has thus bound himself to the suffering and humiliated humanity of the man Jesus in order to reveal himself to human beings is not self-evident. It is a mystery which Luther designates for the first time in the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* by the expression of *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross)."[74] The theology of the cross heavily impacted the majority of Luther's insights on God, Christology and the human condition. This is evident in his lectures because he refers several times to the cross and

---

[72] Lohse, 231.

[73] Ibid, 231.

[74] Lienhard, 65.

to understanding Christ's actions on the cross *alone* as salvific; not just for individual souls but for the sake of humanity as well.

To further explicate this concept, Lienhard adds, "At the center of this *theologia crucis* is the suffering humanity of Jesus Christ. God hides himself there in order to reveal himself there. But he can reveal himself only to those who agree to abandon all preconceived ideas about God and who equally accept humiliation in their own existence."[75] Here we can see where Lienhard has emphasized Luther's own existential crisis in grasping the Christ event. Consistently, Luther writes of the glory of God as seen through the suffering of Christ on the cross as a means to a personal relationship between God and humanity. He reflects on this idea consistently throughout a great number of his works.[76]

In addition to this perception, Luther is advocating that there needs to be a preparatory discussion before fully committing to the Christian faith, largely a humbling of oneself, and all that it entails for faith and life. In these regards, Luther fully acknowledges Chrysostom's interpretation of the text. Referring to Hebrews 3:6, Luther writes, "Therefore we accept Chrysostom's distinction between 'confidence' and 'glory' in our hope. According to him, confidence is characteristic of one who has the courage to take up the cross of Christ, just as diffidence is characteristic of one who flees from the

---

[75] Ibid, 65.

[76] Luther specifically writes of the "theology of the cross," in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, (1518) (LW 31:25-33).

cross of Christ and is ashamed of it." Most importantly, this quote captures Luther's emphasis on one's humbling before the cross as an active acceptance and acknowledgement of the true Christ event.

Luther's "Theology of the Cross" is generally known as one of his hallmarks and I would argue, is one of his greatest contributions to the field of theological study. It is unique in so far as it reflects Luther's existential revelations in understanding the Word becoming flesh and how that pertains to all. Keeping this orientation at the forefront, it is obvious to note where Luther deviates from and adopts theological insights from Chrysostom and other traditional medieval theologians.

An example of such deviation can be seen in each thinker's approach to the author of the epistle's comparison of the Old and New Testaments. Whereas Chrysostom interpreted the author of the epistle as making comparisons between the Old and New, Luther does not take the same approach. Rather, Luther finds ways to signify Christ's presence in both the Old and New Testaments. Lienhard writes, "It is necessary first of all to bring out the way in which Luther enters into the atmosphere of the epistle to the Hebrews which places Christ in the perspective of the Old Testament."[77] This notion is paramount for Luther's theology because it differs from traditional medieval thinking on the epistle.

[77] Lienhard, 64.

Resourcefully, Luther utilizes this exegetical approach with reliance on Old Testament texts, particularly the Psalms.[78] The author of Hebrews quotes the psalms often in his letter; therefore it is only natural that Luther would correlate the two documents together. Through this lens Luther is consistent in his exegetical perspective with his lectures, written within the same time frame ca. 1517, on the Psalms, Romans and Hebrews. He is eager to demonstrate Christ's presence in the Old Testament which is unique to his theological perspective on Scripture. In a way, it breaks down the stigma between Old and New and allots Christ as the common denominator. Of course, this interpretation also greatly affects Luther's perspective on how he translates the Hebrews text, as it makes several comparative references to the "prophets of old" in relation to "the new covenant" found in Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, he does make significant comparisons between Jesus Christ and Moses, indicating that Christ's actions have greater implications for humanity than the actions of Moses. This idea is certainly consistent with Chrysostom's writings and how he intuits the person of Jesus Christ as a reflection of the glory of God, truly human and truly divine. Lienhard adds, "The reformer insists on the uniqueness of the Son as the reflection of the glory of God."[79] The analysis here, for Luther, is to use the prologue to decipher the greatness of Christ compared to angels, prophets, etc. Lienhard's point is to

---

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid, 66.

reiterate Luther's emphasis that Christ is God, the Son is divine; therefore, he is greater than all of these, hence: *excellentia Christi*.

His divorce from traditional and medieval exegesis is particularly significant in these regards because he seeks to alter the perspective of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faithful community. Notably, the lecture on Hebrews 2:3 serves as a prime example of observing Luther's shift in exegesis. The traditional viewpoint sought to interpret Christ's human nature as *excellentia Christi*, not only as greater than all the prophets of old but as an example for humanity.

In this lecture, we can see Luther developing his theological understanding of the Christ event. More importantly, Luther appropriates Augustine's understanding of *sacramentum et exemplum* in order to better commentate on this text. This notion plays a central role for Luther's understanding of Christ in Hebrews, according to his understanding of faith. Lienhard also considers this Luther's position on this suggesting, "in order to understand clearly the Christology which Luther develops in his lectures on the epistle to the Hebrews, it is important finally to examine a phrase which appears several times: *sacramentum exemplum*."[80]

The following excerpt illustrates Luther's theological progression on this logic. He states:

> Therefore the whole substance of the new law and its righteousness is that one and only faith in Christ…Therefore it is impossible for faith in Him to be idle; for it is alive, and it itself works and triumphs, and in this way

[80] Ibid, 72.

> works flow forth spontaneously from faith. For in this way our patience flows from the patience of Christ, and our humility from His, and the other good works in like manner, provided that we believe firmly that He has done all these things for us.[81]

The main point here is Luther's use of the words, *for us*. While it is certainly essential that one must strive to seek Christ's example, Luther wants to be clear in advocating that one must first note the Christ event as a gift *for us*, which requires faith. He quotes 1 Peter 2:21 in supporting his claim of Christ's suffering *for us* as the ultimate sacrament.[82] Scholars have also taken notice of Luther's claims here, particularly Lienhard who writes, "That is to say, to show that Christ has not only died and been raised for himself, but for us. He is the cause of the death of the old person and of the new life of the Christian. He leads believers there. That is the meaning of the word *sacrament* for Luther."[83]

For Luther, the main concern remains, not so much on imitating Christ but rather, to emphasize Christ's capabilities as both human and divine. Clearly Christ's suffering and rising from the dead for the sake of the world is beyond any human ability; therefore, one must first have faith in this event; otherwise it does not mean anything. Luther also claims that those who desire to imitate Christ must first believe that the event is a

---

[81] LW 29:123

[82] Ibid.

[83] Lienhard, 72.

sacrament. He warns that those who begin elsewhere are in great error because "they begin with the example, when they should begin with the sacrament."[84]

While the greatness of Christ is certainly not a disputed topic between Luther and Chrysostom, the conundrum of Hebrews 2:7 suggests otherwise. The verse reads, "You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor."[85] Luther argues that the patristic writers have incorrectly interpreted this text saying, "A great number of teachers, especially Jerome and, at different times, Augustine, Ambrose, and Chrysostom, seem to understand it as referring to mankind alone."[86] This understanding of humanity is most likely derived from the original Psalmist[87] noting that God created human beings, "lower than the angels."[88] Luther is adamantly opposed in using *humankind alone* as the focal point for this passage.

Luther's critique takes the form of a warning saying, "Therefore, those who think that this verse refers to the dignity of human nature, which is very close to that of the angels, are following an improper understanding, which is the death of true understanding."[89] It is a little unclear and difficult to conceive of Luther's argument in

---

[84] LW 29:124.

[85] Hebrews 2.7 NRSV

[86] LW 29:125.

[87] Psalm 8:5, "You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor." NRSV

[88] New Oxford Annotated Bible, 371.

[89] LW 29:126.

this particular lecture. His main critique reflects his interpretation of the patristic writers as considering the text as a statement about humankind.

According to Chrysostom's manuscript, Homily IV states, "'But,' he [Paul] says, 'we see Him who was made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, for the suffering of death.'"[90] The idea of "being made less than the angels" as described by the Psalmist, presupposes that the angels are of a higher being than humanity. The author of Hebrews may have used this text from the Psalms to affirm that he concurs with the Psalmist, but also to show Jesus' humanity as truly human. These are great theological implications by the author, outlining the hope of glory that humanity has been given because of that suffering of Jesus on the cross.

While Luther certainly would not disagree with this idea, he does however, differ in translation. He denies the reference as a statement on humankind and indicates that it was Christ, "who for a while was made lower than the angels"; meaning that he was without the angels and subsequently, God. This idea is most likely based on his understanding of Phil 2: 7 where Paul writes of Jesus' emptying of himself. Luther even takes this translation so far as to put it in the German Bible writing, "You have made him lack the angels for a short time."[91]

---

[90] NPNF1 14:383.

[91] WA DB 7:348-49. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel. 12 vols. in 15. Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–.

Ultimately Luther's main contention with this passage is the notion that Christ could *ever* be lower than the angels. He takes a different position altogether asserting, "Speaking without rashness, therefore, it seems that this verse says nothing about the dignity of our nature but is an explanation of the preceding verse, namely, of that wonderful memory and visitation of God, who is most mindful when He forgets and who visits most when he abandons.[92] In other words, Luther's critique is in "knowing God," which is more important than knowing humanity in this particular text.

Another theme in Luther's lectures on Hebrews is the dependence of faith for salvation. He appears to have used Chrysostom quite frequently in regards to justifying faith and salvation, particularly with reference to Hebrews 2:10. The NRSV translates this verse, "It was fitting that God, for whom and through all things exists, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings."[93] Luther identifies Chrysostom's interpretation of this verse which suggests that Christ is both leader and cause of salvation. Luther uses the verse from Hebrews 5:9 to support Chrysostom's position in reference to Christ stating, "He became the Source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."[94]

In addition to Luther's praise of Chrysostom's exegetical work, Luther expands upon this by both acknowledging Christ as salvation and an Ideal and Exemplar of God.

---

[92] LW 29:127.

[93] Hebrews 2:10 NRSV

[94] LW 29: 131.

As a reaction to Chrysostom's work, Luther explains his interpretation of salvation using the Hebrews text:

> Here it is beautifully shown how we are saved, namely, through Christ as the Idea and Exemplar, to whose image all who are saved are conformed. For God the Father made Christ to be the Sign and Idea, in order that those who adhere to Him by faith might be transformed into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18) and thus be drawn away from the images of the World.[95]

Luther expounds upon Chrysostom's emphasis on Christ as cause and leader, mainly because he sees it as a means of salvation for all. Christ is able to gather all people to him and away from the things of the world. Salvation can be attained through Christ who is "the Instrument and the means by which God leads His [*sic*] sons [children]."[96] Therefore, as Luther advocates, Christ's suffering was perfected, in so far as it revealed God's mercy and love for humankind. Luther concludes by noting, "For God does not compel men [*sic*] to salvation by force and fear, but by this pleasing spectacle of His [*sic*] mercy and love He [*sic*] moves and draws through love all whom He [sic] will save."[97]

The other important element that Luther considers an essential element to salvation is faith. As he has indicated in the previous excerpt, one can fully become an example "by faith" and faith alone. For both Luther and Chrysostom, faith is an essential element that must be fleshed out in order to correctly understand the Christ event and

---

[95] Ibid, 132.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

what it means *for us*. Lienhard also explains, "The link between the believer and Christ, designated by the phrase *fides Christi*, is not the fruit of a mystical union between Christ and the faithful. It is by the Word that Christ is presented and revealed to human beings as saving reality."[98]

Another point of similarity between Luther and Chrysostom is the conversation regarding the battle between Christ and the devil. Luther sees the Christ event as an extraordinary event that illustrates Christ defeating the devil through suffering and death. Both Luther and Chrysostom consider this a victory over death. A theme that is important to their understanding of the glory of God in Hebrews. This is profound in Hebrews 2:14, where Luther agrees with Chrysostom's attitude on Christ, death and the devil. Lienhard adds, "With traditional theology and according to the texts which he is interpreting, Luther speaks of the work of Christ simultaneously from the point of view of reconciliation with God and from the point of view of redemption, ie. The struggle against the powers."[99] In other words, for Luther, the battle between Christ and the devil illustrates the role that Christ plays in the will of God for humanity, as well as experiencing the suffering and dying of human life. Perhaps Luther's inspiration for this tension of life and death may be correlated with how existential crisis and inner struggles with sin and salvation.

---

[98] Lienhard, 77.

[99] Ibid, 76.

As scholars can gather, Luther has taken different strides to interpret the exegetical text of Hebrews from Chrysostom and other traditional medieval writers. These modified interpretations are a result of Luther's appropriation of traditional texts to fit his own contexts and personal quest for truth. Considering that Luther did not create ideas from a vacuum, the traditional texts from the patristic era and beyond certainly played a valuable role for Luther and his exegetical lectures. A more detailed study on Luther's reception of these ancient and medieval texts would help us to learn more about Luther's appropriation and what drove him to modify them as he sought necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is evident that Luther relied heavily upon Chrysostom's Christological exegesis on the *Epistle to the Hebrews.* This was the case with most Reformation-era scholars as they received ancient and medieval texts such as the church fathers, the *Glossa*, and other significant works. Chrysostom's homilies, in particular, were considered both orthodox and foundational for most interpretations on the letter to the Hebrews. This is certainly reflected in the hermeneutical lineage of other writers and theologians on the letter.

Chrysostom's thirty-four *Homilies on Hebrews* reflects a great deal of the context and people to which he was preaching. Considering that his work was thoroughly dogmatic in nature, Chrysostom uses the Hebrews text as a teaching resource about the two natures of Christ and seeks to establish an orthodox position on understanding the triune God. Heresies such as Arianism, Sabellianism, etc are consistently refuted. He also greatly emphasizes Christian life and ethics such as neighborly love and living faithfully.

Luther's reception of Chrysostom's homilies in his *Lectures on Hebrews* is noticeably significant considering he quotes Chrysostom more than any other resource. At times Luther fully agrees with Chrysostom's conclusions. In particular, Luther praises Chrysostom's description of the battle between Christ, death and the Devil. He also appropriates Chrysostom's emphasis on faith and its implementation in Christian life. I

believe that these two elements can easily be equated with Luther's own context and existential dialogue. It is obvious that Luther struggled with the concepts of sin and salvation, grace and mercy, especially in his younger years. In these regards, his lectures and exegetical interpretations on Hebrews illustrate the "young Luther's" theological development and Christian progression.

It should be assumed that Luther's position on the two natures of Christ reflects Chrysostom's teaching. Luther's writing echoes this understanding, even though he does not explicitly make reference to define it in dogmatic terms as Chrysostom posits. Luther never challenges Chrysostom on his understanding of the two natures of Christ. Rather, Luther most likely, considered this understanding of Christ to be evident as it did not appear to be a debated topic in his time and context.

Luther's main concerns, however, shift the exegetical agenda, focusing more towards an understanding that the Christ event was *for us*, and should not be regarded solely as an example of human imitation and following as advocated in earlier writings. This previous notion is seen throughout Chrysostom's works, as he advocates the Christian faith and life. His emphasis on moral living and Christian practice is consistent throughout his homilies and seeks to teach people about the two natures and Christian living through the person of Jesus Christ, who is the most excellent and example for all humanity.

In these regards, Luther takes a turn towards lifting up the necessity of faith versus just a moral life. He considers the Christ event a true sacrament with the

understanding that God has drawn us towards truth and glory which can only achieved through the gift of faith. He seeks to emphasize the fact that God has done this *for us*.

For Luther, faith and knowing God through the Christ event is where he makes a departure from ancient Christology. In doing so, he makes way for a new perspective of the Christ event which may be seen as a significant discovery of the Reformation. Through his own lens and context, Luther uses the Epistle to the Hebrews as a way to exegete new interpretations of the Christ event, mainly as a relationship that reveals a *God for us*.

Bibliography

Backus, Irena. *The Reception of the Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1997.

Bornkamm, Heinrich. *Luther and the Old Testament*. Translated by Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

Cockerill, Gareth Lee. "The Better Resurrection (Heb. 11:35): A Key to the Structure and Rhetorical Purpose of Hebrews 11." *Tyndale Bulletin* 51:2, (2000).

Colijn, Brenda B. "'Let us Approach': Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996).

Chrysostom, John. A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series. Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. New York, 1886–89. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.

Eusebius. *The History of the Church*. Edited by Andrew Louth. Translated by G.A. Williamson. New York: Penguin Putnam, 1965.

Gelardini, Gabriella. Editor. *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005.

Gray, Patrick. "Brotherly Love and the High Priest Christology of Hebrews." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 122:2, (Summer 2003).

Hagen, Kenneth. *A Theology of Testament in the Young Luther in the Lectures on Hebrews*. Edited by Heiko A. Oberman. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974.

Hagen, Kenneth. "The Problem of Testament in Luther's 'Lectures on Hebrews.' *The Harvard Theological Review* 63:1 (Jan. 1970), 61-90.

Hall, Christopher A. *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Heen, Erik M. and Philip D. W. Krey. "Hebrews." In the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. 10. Edited by Thomas C. Oden. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Edited and translated by Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Lienhard, Marc. *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*. Translated by Edwin H. Robertson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982.

Luther, Martin. Luther's Works: American Edition. Volumes 1–30: edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76. Volumes 31–55: edited by Helmut Lehmann. Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/ Fortress, 1957–86.

Luther, Martin. *Luther: Early Theological Works*. Edited and translated by James Atkinson. *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol 16. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.

Mackie, Scott D. "Confession of the Son of God in the Exordium of Hebrews." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30:4, (2008).

MacLeod, David J. "Christ, the Believer's High Priest: An Exposition of Hebrews 7:26-28." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, (July-September 2005).

Mayer, Wendy and Pauline Allen, *John Chrysostom*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

Mayer, Wendy and Pauline Allen. "The Thirty-Four Homilies on Hebrews: The Last Series Delivered by Chrysostom in Constantinople?" *Byzantion*, Vol. 15, 1995.

Perry, Tim. "The Historical Jesus, Anti-Judaism, and the Christology of Hebrews: A Theological Reflection." *Didaskalia*, (Spring 1999).

Rhee, Victor (Sung-Yul). "Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 1:1-2:4." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, (April-June 2000).

Rhee, Victor (Sung-Yul). "Christology and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 5:11-6:20." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:1, (March 2000).

Still, Todd D. "Christos as Pistos: The Faith(fullness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, 2007.

Yeago, David S. "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis." *Pro Ecclesia* 3:2 (Spr. 1994), 152-164.